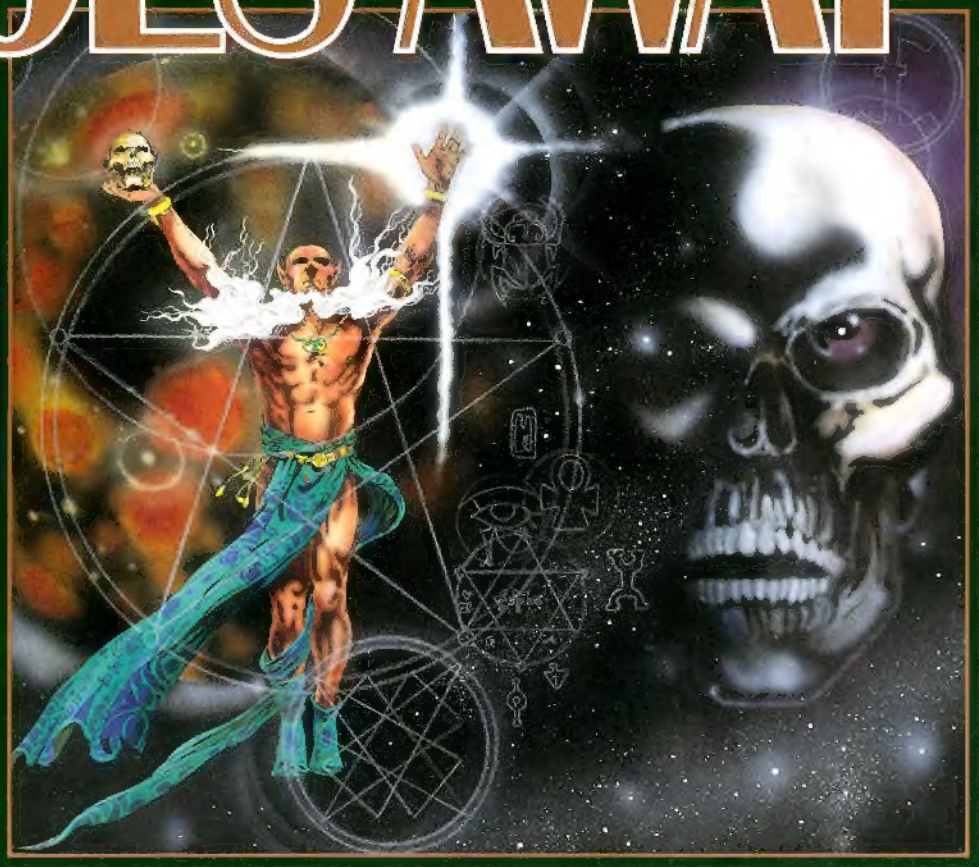
THE #1 FANTASY BEST-SELLER

LARRY NIVEN

THE MAGIC GOES AWAY



Graphic Adaptation by Paul Kupperberg and Jan Duursema

SCIENCE FICTION GRAPHIC NOVEL • SF 6 • $5.95/CAN $7.95

DC

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the MAGIC GOES away

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THE MAGIC GOES AWAY
is published by
DC Comics Inc.
666 Fifth Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10103

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Cover painting by
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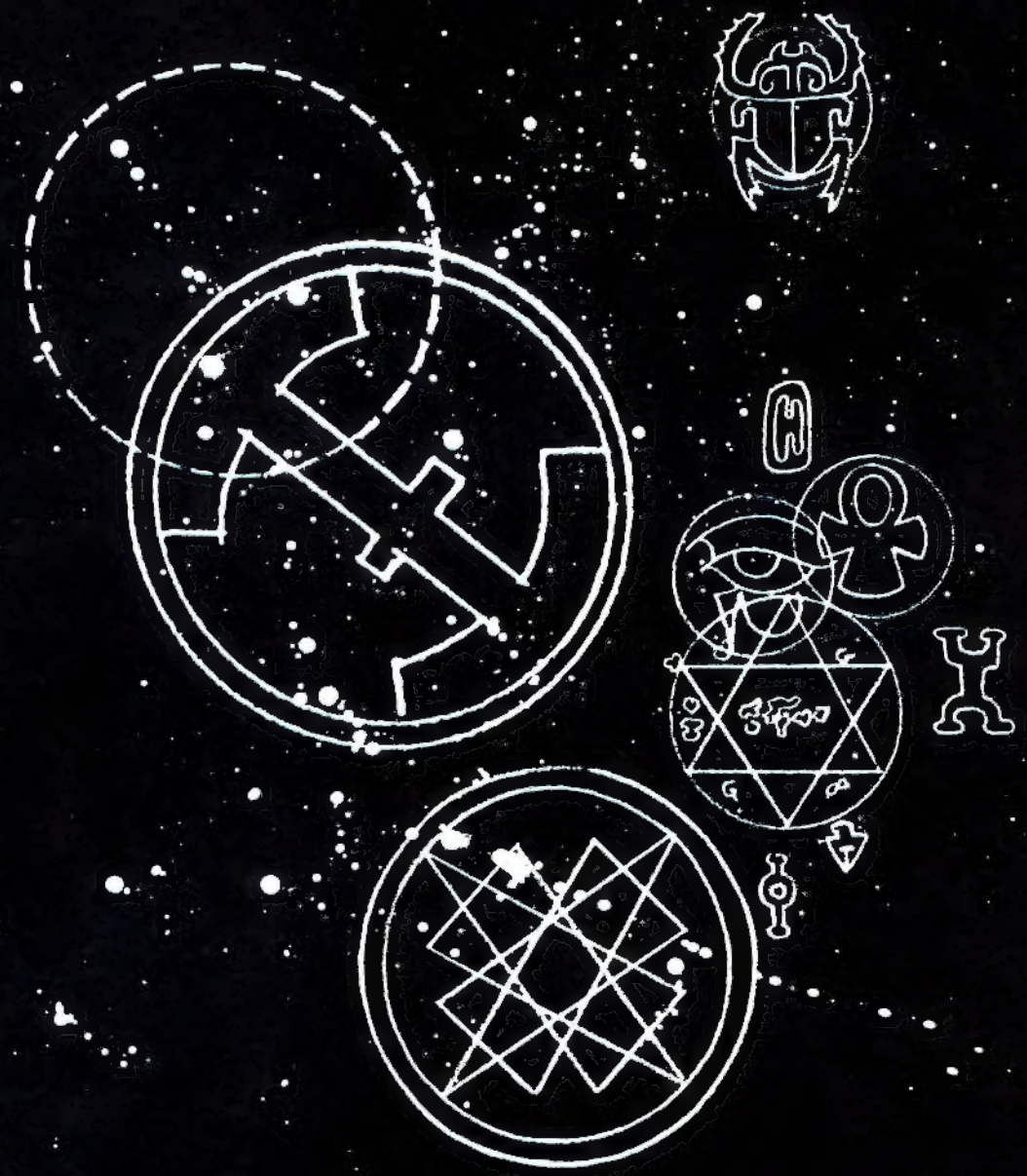

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THE WAVES WASHED HIM ASHORE ABOARD A SECTION OF THE WOODEN ROOF FROM AN ATLANTEAN WINERY. HE WAS HALF DEAD, AND MAD.

THERE WAS A CORPSE ON THE MAKESHIFT RAFT WITH HIM, A CENTAUR GIRL, THREE DAYS DEAD OF NO OBVIOUS CAUSE.

THE FISHERFOLK WERE AWED. THEY KNEW THE WORKMANSHIP OF THE ROOF, AND KNEW THE STRANGER MUST HAVE SURVIVED THE GREATEST DISASTER IN HUMAN HISTORY.

PERHAPS THEY CONSIDERED HIM A GOOD LUCK CHARM.

HE WAS LUCKY. THEY FED HIM BY HAND UNTIL HE COULD FEED HIMSELF.

WHEN HE GREW STRONG, THEY PUT HIM TO WORK.

BY DAY HE WORKED LIKE A GOLEM, TIRELESSLY. HE COULD NOT OR WOULD NOT SPEAK. THEY HAD TO TELL HIM WHEN TO STOP.

BY NIGHT HE WOULD PULL HIS BROKEN SWORD FROM ITS SCABBARD AND TURN IT IN HIS HANDS, STUDYING IT.

FOUR MONTHS AFTER HIS ARRIVAL HE SPOKE HIS FIRST WORDS TO THE OLDEST MAN IN THE VILLAGE:

I HAVE TO TALK TO A MAGICIAN.

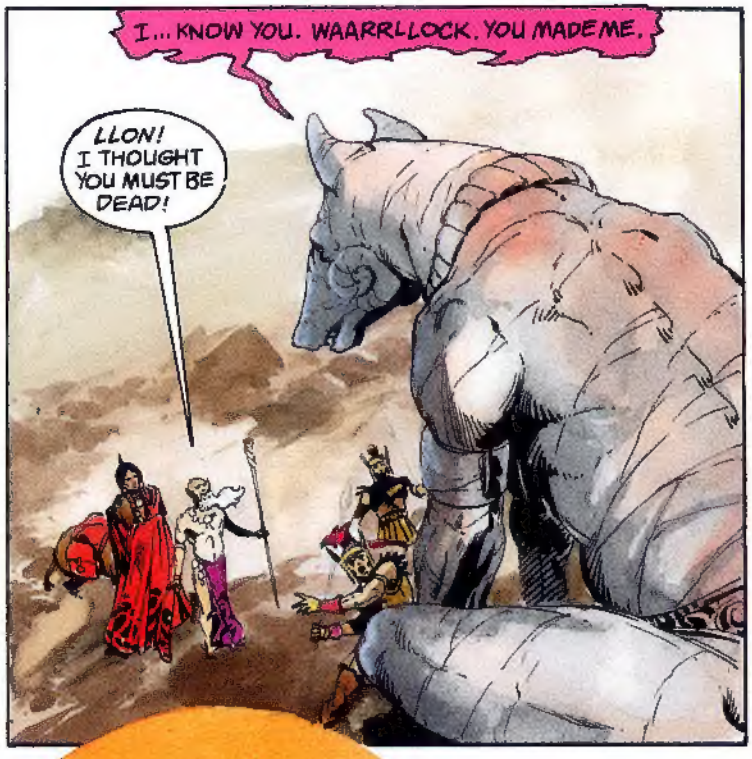
THE OLD MAN EXPLAINED THAT A WITCH LIVED IN THE NEXT VILLAGE, BUT THAT THIS *MIRANDEE* HAD DEPARTED LONG AGO.

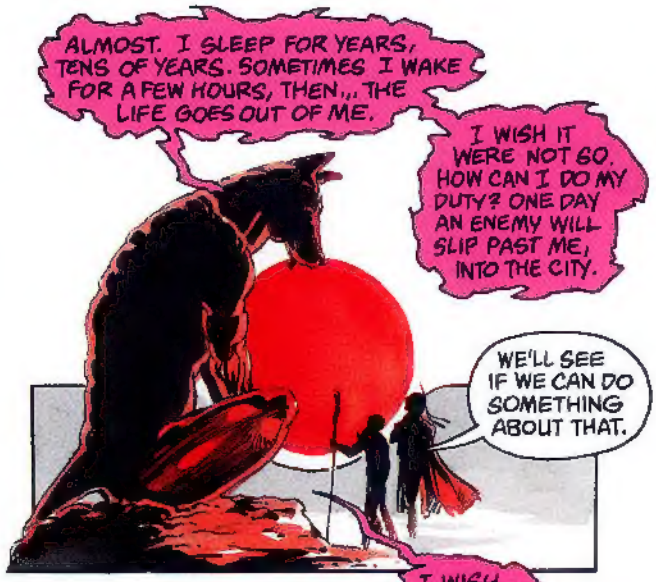
MAD *OROLANDES* NODDED AS IF HE UNDERSTOOD.

HE WAS GONE THE NEXT MORNING. HE LEFT ONE OF HIS GOLD BRACELETS IN THE HEADMAN'S HOUSE.

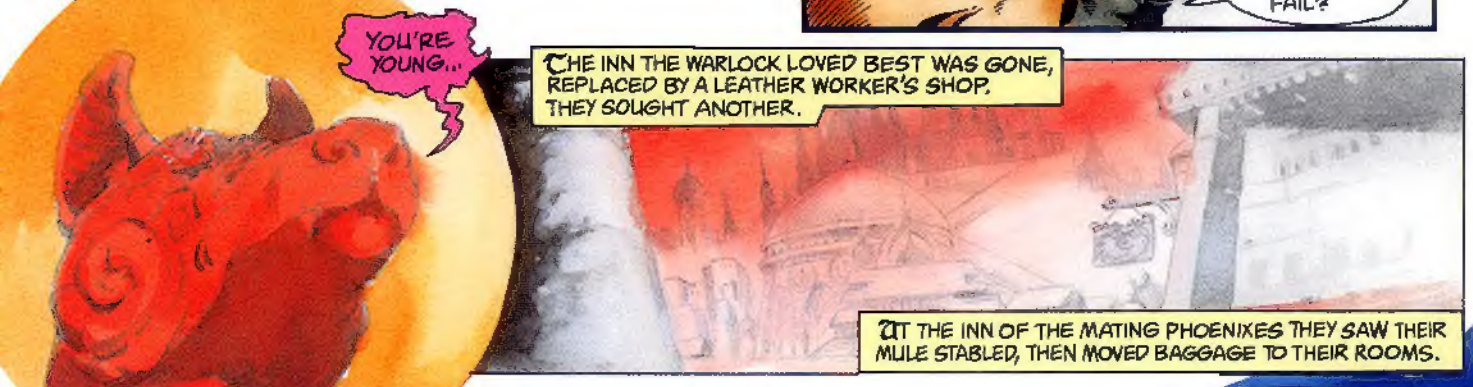
PRISSTHIL AND THE VILLAGE CALLED WARLOCK'S CAVE WERE SIX HUNDRED MILES APART. ONCE THE WARLOCK WOULD HAVE FLOWN THE DISTANCE IN A SINGLE NIGHT.
EVEN TODAY, THEY MIGHT HAVE TAKEN RIDING DRAGONS... AND IN REGIONS WHERE TOO MUCH USE OF MAGIC HAD LEECHED MANA FROM THE EARTH, THEY MIGHT HAVE LEFT DRAGON BONES TO MERGE WITH THE ROCKS. DRAGON METABOLISM WAS PARTLY MAGICAL.
IT ANNOYED THE WARLOCK TO BE LEAVING WARLOCK'S CAVE ON MULEBACK; BUT HE AND CLUBFOOT CONSIDERED THIS PRUDENT.
CLUBFOOT AND WARLOCK, TWO OF THE MOST POWERFUL MAGICIANS LEFT IN THE WORLD, CAME TO THE CONFERENCE AT PRISSTHIL ON FOOT, LEADING A PACK MULE.
THE TREMENDOUS SHADOW OF MOUNT VALHALLA, LAST HOME OF A QUARRELSOME PANTHEON OF GODS NOW GONE MYTHICAL, SPRAWLED EASTWARD ACROSS PRISSTHIL...
THE VILLAGE HAS GROWN SINCE LAST I'VE SEEN IT, ONE HUNDRED TEN YEARS AGO. LOOK--THE NEWER HOUSES AREN'T HELD UP BY SPELLS... BUT BY THEIR OWN STRENGTH.
PRISSTHIL WAS FOUNDED ON MAGIC, YOU KNOW.
THAT CRATER IS OLD, BUT YOU CAN STILL SEE THE SHAPE OF IT. THAT'S FISTFALL. THE VILLAGE STARTED AS A TRADING CENTER FOR FRAGMENTS OF THE BOULDER OF STARSTONE THAT MADE THE CRATER.

LOOK, THERE ARE GUARDS UNDER LLON! LLON USED TO BE ALL THE GUARD PRISSTHIL NEEDED!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THAT BIG STONE STATUE?
HO, TRAVELERS! WHAT WOULD YOU IN PRISSTHIL?
WE INTEND PRISSTHIL'S SALVATION, AND THE WORLD'S!
OH, MAGICIANS! WELL, YOU'RE WELCOME...THOUGH I DON'T TRUST YOUR SALVATION. WHAT HAVE YOU COME TO DO FOR US?
MAKE MORE STARSTONE?
IT WAS FOR NO TRIVIAL PURPOSE THAT WE TRAVELED SIX HUNDRED MILES.
I'M CERTAIN YOUR LIFE STORY IS UTTERLY FASCINATING, GUARDSMAN... TO SOMEONE. WE WOULD PASS NOW AND BE ON OUR... EH?
YOUR PARDON, BUT MY GRANDFATHER USED TO FLY HALF AROUND THE WORLD TO ATTEND A BANQUET.
POOR OLD MAN. NONE OF HIS SPELLS WORKED, THERE AT THE END. HE WANTED TO TRAIN ME FOR MAGIC TOO. I HAD MORE SENSE.
W-A-A-A-A-A-
WAAAAAAAARL... LOCK...


I... KNOW YOU. WAARRLLOCK. YOU MADE ME.
LLON! I THOUGHT YOU MUST BE DEAD!


ALMOST. I SLEEP FOR YEARS, TENS OF YEARS. SOMETIMES I WAKE FOR A FEW HOURS, THEN... THE LIFE GOES OUT OF ME.
I WISH IT WERE NOT SO. HOW CAN I DO MY DUTY? ONE DAY AN ENEMY WILL SLIP PAST ME, INTO THE CITY.
WE'LL SEE IF WE CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT.

I WISH YOU LUCK.
THE BEST BRAINS IN THE WORLD ARE GATHERING HERE. HOW CAN WE FAIL?


YOU'RE YOUNG..
THE INN THE WARLOCK LOVED BEST WAS GONE, REPLACED BY A LEATHER WORKER'S SHOP. THEY SOUGHT ANOTHER.
AT THE INN OF THE MATING PHOENIXES THEY SAW THEIR MULE STABLED, THEN MOVED BAGGAGE TO THEIR ROOMS.

THE WARLOCK DUG IN A SADDLEBAG. HE PULLED OUT SPARE CLOTHING --
--THEN A COPPER DISK WITH MARKINGS AROUND THE RIM.

HE MOVED TO SET IT ASIDE.
BUT HE STOPPED, STARING AT IT.
OH, HIS MAGIC HAD BEEN BIG AND SHOWY IN THOSE DAYS!

FLOATING CASTLES, ARMIES DESTROYED BY LIGHTNING, PHANTOM CITIES BUILT AND DESTROYED IN A NIGHT!
IN HIS PRIDE HE NICKNAMED HIMSELF *WARLOCK*. HAD HE KNOWN HIS NICKNAME WOULD BECOME A GENERIC TERM FOR MAGICIANS, HE WOULD NOT HAVE SHOWN SURPRISE.
BUT OVER THE DECADES HIS SPELLS STOPPED WORKING. IT HAPPENED TO ALL MAGICIANS. HE MOVED AWAY, AND HIS POWER RETURNED... THEN GRADUALLY DWINDLED.
IT HAPPENED TO NATIONS TOO. BOUND TOGETHER BY ITS OWN GODS AND TRADITIONS AND LAWS AND TRADE NETWORKS, A NATION MIGHT SEEM AS OLD AND AS STABLE AS THE MOUNTAINS THEMSELVES...
...UNTIL TREATIES SEALED BY OATHS AND MAGIC *LOST* THEIR POWER... UNTIL BARBARIANS WITH SWORDS CAME SWARMING OVER THE BORDERS.
BUT THE WARLOCK WAS THE FIRST TO LEARN *WHY*, VIA AN EXPERIMENT HE PERFORMED WITH AN ENCHANTED COPPER DISK.
ALL KNEW IT WAS SO.
IF HE KEPT HIS DISCOVERY SECRET THROUGH SUCCEEDING DECADES, HIS MOTIVE WAS COMPASSION. HIS TERRIBLE TRUTH SPELLED THE END OF CIVILIZATION.

YET IT WAS OF NO EARTHLY USE TO ANYONE.
FIFTY YEARS AGO HIS SECRET HAD FINALLY ESCAPED HIM, FOR GOOD OR EVIL.
IT WAS HARD TO KNOW WHICH.
NEVER MIND THAT. LET'S GET DINNER.
SHORTLY.
I STILL THINK WE SHOULD HAVE CONTRIVED TO LOSE THAT.
I DISAGREE.
NOW LET'S GET DINNER.
IT WAS LUCK FOR OROLANDES THAT PRISSTHIL WAS NO FARTHER, ELSE HE WOULD HAVE DIED ON THE WAY.
PAST THE BARREN, DISH-SHAPED DEPRESSION, BEYOND THE STONE GATES... IF MAGICIANS RESIDED WITHIN--
--THE JOURNEY WOULD HAVE BEEN WORTH THE TOLL HE PAID IN DISTRESS.
...YOU'VE CARRIED WAVYHILL'S SKULL SIX HUNDRED MILES, WHEN WE HAD TO THROW AWAY BAGGAGE WE NEEDED MORE. IT'S JUST A SKULL... NOT EVEN IN GOOD CONDITION!
BUT IF THERE'S ENOUGH LOCAL MANA TO POWER YOUR SPELLS, AND ALL ELSE GOES EXACTLY RIGHT...
...YOU JUST MIGHT BE ABLE TO BRING WAVYHILL BACK TO LIFE SO HE CAN KILL YOU!
EVEN IF I REVIVE HIM, IT'S STILL JUST A SKULL.
YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT... IF YOU DON'T STICK YOUR FINGERS IN ITS MOUTH!

HE'S GOT EVERY REASON TO WANT YOUR LIFE...AND *MINE*, TOO, BECAUSE I'M THE ONE WHO LED *YOU* TO SHISKABIL AND *HIM*.
HE MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN THAT.
I'D RATHER HE DID. HELLSPAWN! I'LL NEVER FORGET DEAD, GUTTED SHISKABIL...DRIED BLOOD EVERYWHERE, AS IF IT HAD RAINED BLOOD. NO TELLING HOW MANY VILLAGES HE GUTTED THAT WAY.
I'M GOING TO REVIVE HIM TONIGHT. WANT TO HELP?
=SIGH= WOULD I LET YOU TRY IT ALONE?
YOU WORRY TOO MUCH, CLUBFOOT. THERE'S *MANA* HERE... SEE?
NOT MUCH, I'LL GRANT. BUT ENOUGH FOR OUR PURPOSES.
I DON'T LIKE IT, WARLOCK.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO, MY FRIEND. JUST BE THERE. NOW, LET'S GO.
A LEAN, SCARRED SWORDSMAN WATCHED THE WARLOCK WITH HAUNTED EYES.
THE WARLOCK DID NOT NOTICE.

IT MAY BE WE'VE HAD TOO MUCH WINE TO TRY THIS SORT OF THING TONIGHT, WARLOCK.

WOULD YOU RATHER TRY IT TOMORROW, BEFORE DAWN, WITH HANGOVERS?

I WANT WAVYHILL WITH ME WHEN WE MEET MIRANDEE AND PIRANTHER.

ALL RIGHT, GO AHEAD... IF YOU'RE DETERMINED TO SEE THIS THROUGH.

IN ANSWER, THE WARLOCK BEGAN TO SING. THOUGH HE WAS OLD, TALL AND LEAN, HIS VOICE THIN AND REEDY, HE COULD HOLD A TUNE.

THE WORDS HE SANG BELONGED TO A LANGUAGE NO LONGER USED EXCEPT BY MEMBERS OF THE SORCERERS' GUILD.

A LOOP OF THIN LEATHER THONG MENDED THE BROKEN JAWBONE, AND OTHER STRIPS OF THONG WENT ALONG THE CHEEKBONES, THE JAW HINGES, THE EARS, FORMING A CRUDE DIAGRAM OF THE MUSCLES OF A HUMAN FACE.

"KRANTHKORFOOL, SPEAK TO ME!" THE WARLOCK SAID IN THE OLD LANGUAGE.

THE SKULL OPENED ITS JAWS WIDE AND *SCREAMED.*

COVERING THEIR EARS DIDN'T HELP. THE SKULL'S VOICE WAS NOT TROUBLING THE AIR, AND IT DID NOT REACH THE EARS.

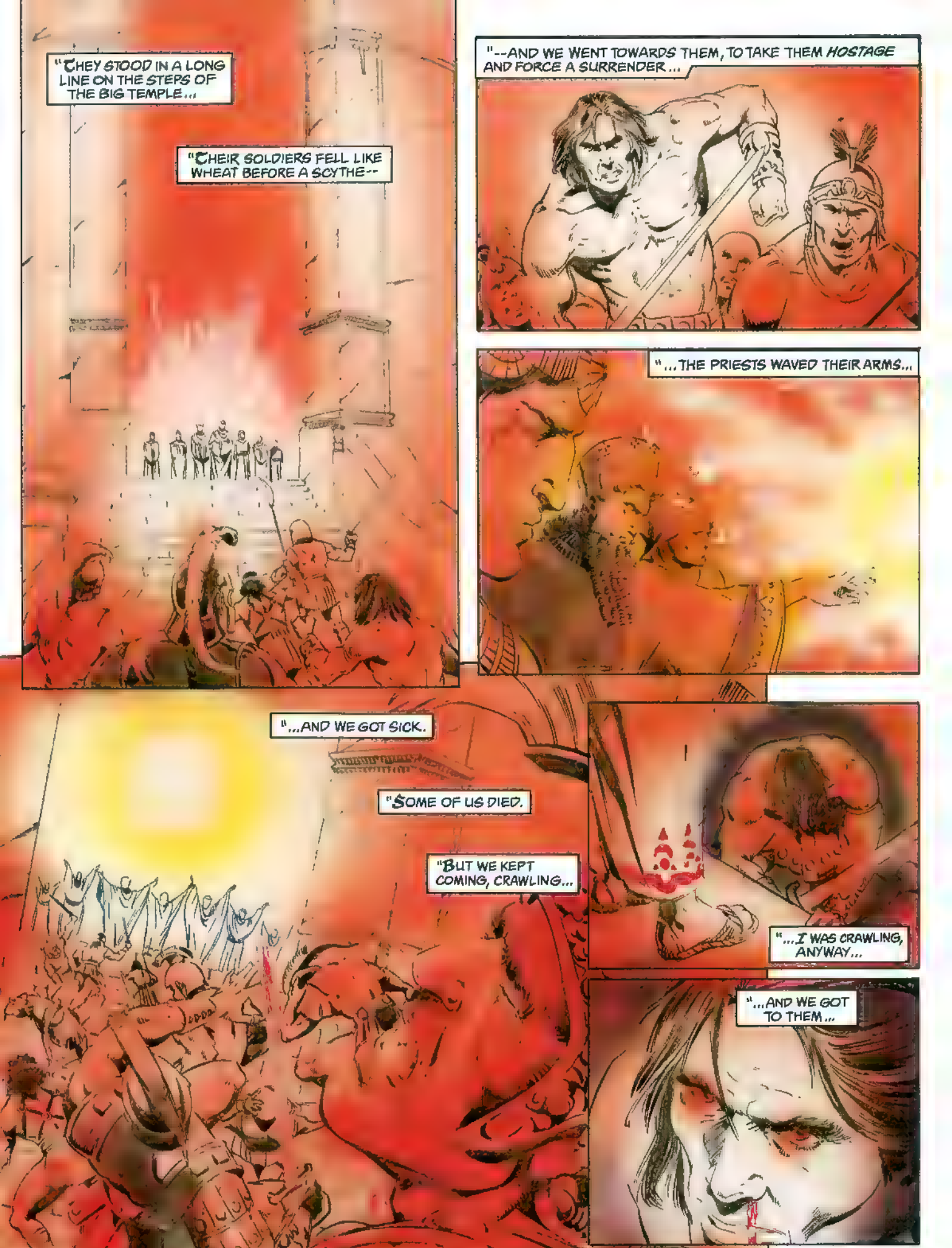
THE SKULL SCREAMED ITS AGONY. MINUTES PASSED BEFORE IT PAUSED, AS IF DRAWING BREATH...

INTO THE PAUSE THE WARLOCK SHOUTED·
KRANTHKORPOOL, STOP! IT'S OVER! IT'S BEEN OVER FOR TWENTY YEARS!
T-TWENTY YEARS...?
TWENTY YEARS AGO... THAT RUG MERCHANT... THAT WEREWOLF KEPT TEARING AT ME...
...TEARING AT ME! IT WENT ON FOREVER AND EVER, AND I COULDN'T DIE!
IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT FOR USING THAT SPELL THAT MADE YOU UNKILLABLE, KRANTHKORPOOL. IT TOOK ME ALL THIS TIME JUST TO FIND YOUR TRUE NAME.
CALL ME WAVYHILL, WARLOCK. WHAT DO I LOOK LIKE?
YOU WERE THE WORLD'S FIRST NECROMANCER. YOU WERE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DEFEAT ME.
WELL... I'VE LOOKED BETTER.
LOOK, I'D BE DEAD IF I HADN'T BROUGHT HELP. YOU USED YOUR POWER FOR EVIL, BUT NOBODY DOUBTS YOUR SKILL. TOMORROW I MEET TWO POWERFUL MAGICIANS...
DO I KNOW OF THEM?
FINE, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED.
I NEED YOUR HELP, WAVYHILL. TECHNICAL HELP.
HAH! FROM ME?

PIRANTHER. MIRANDEE.
YES, YES, I KNOW PIRANTHER WALKED OUT ON MY LAST CONFERENCE... AND I *DID* CALL HIM A SHORTSIGHTED *FOOL*. HE TOOK A WHOLE COLONY OF HIS PEOPLE TO THE SOUTH LAND MASS AND SWORE NEVER TO COME BACK.
AND HE NEVER DID... UNTIL *NOW*.
YOU'VE ROUSED MY INTEREST, WARLOCK. CAN YOU MAKE ME A WHOLE MAN AGAIN?
LOOK AT ME! I'D WISH MY YOUTH BACK, IF WISHING WERE ALL IT TOOK...
...BUT THERE ARE OTHER WAYS. MAYBE. A MEANS OF RESTORING THE WORLD'S *MANA* FROM AN OUTSIDE SOURCE.
THE MOON.
MANA FROM THE MOON? I NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT.
STILL ...WHY NOT? STARSTONES ARE RICH IN *MANA*. WHY NOT THE MOON? BUT WHERE WOULD WE FIND MAGIC POWERFUL ENOUGH TO REACH THE ... EH? WHO...?
MY BRACELET SEES THROUGH THE WOOD. IT IS NOTHING ...A *MUNDANE*.
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
GO AWAY!

KRA-AK!
HE... HE'S ATTACKING! BEHIND ME, WARLOCK!
I HAVE TO TALK TO A MAGICIAN!
YOU ARE INTERRUPTING MAGICIANS ENGAGED IN PRIVATE BUSINESS.
YOU ARE MAGICIANS!
AND YOU ARE IN OVER YOUR HEAD, SWORDSMAN!
STOP! HIS SWORD'S BROKEN!
YES. I BROKE IT.
WHY DID IT HAPPEN?
CLANK!
BACK UP AND START OVER. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT. WHO ARE YOU?
OROLANDES, GREEK SOLDIER.
WHY DID YOU BREAK YOUR SWORD?

I...I HATED IT. I THOUGHT MAYBE IT HAPPENED BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE I KILLED.
NOT THE OTHER SOLDIERS.
THE...THE PRIESTS.
YOU WERE IN THE ATLANTIS INVASION!
YES. WE FINALLY INVADED ATLANTIS.
FIRST TIME GREEKS EVER GOT THAT FAR. WE CAME FOR SLAVES AND TREASURE. THAT'S ALL.
WE WON. THE ARMIES OF ATLANTIS MUST HAVE GOTTEN SOFT. WE WENT THROUGH THEM LIKE THEY WERE NOTHING. NOTHING!
BUT THE PRIESTS...WERE SOMETHING ELSE.


"They stood in a long line on the steps of the big temple...
"Their soldiers fell like wheat before a scythe--
"--and we went towards them, to take them *hostage* and force a surrender...
"...the priests waved their arms...
"...and we got sick.
"Some of us died.
"But we kept coming, crawling...
"...I was crawling, anyway...
"...and we got to them...

"...AND KILLED THEM.
"AND THEN ATLANTIS WAS OURS.
"OURS! AT LAST! HUNDREDS OF YEARS WE'D DREAMED OF CONQUERING ATLANTIS. WE'D TAKE THEIR TREASURE.
"WE'D TAKE AWAY THEIR WEAPONS.
"WE'D MAKE THEM PAY TRIBUTE..."
...BUT WE NEVER... WE NEVER WANTED TO KILL THEM ALL.
OLD MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN. EVERYONE. NOBODY EVER THOUGHT OF THAT...
YOU SON OF A TROLL! I HAD FRIENDS IN ATLANTIS. HOW DID YOU LIVE THROUGH IT? WHY DIDN'T YOU DIE WITH THE REST..?
TH-THERE WAS A BIG GOLD TAU SYMBOL...

...AT THE TOP OF THE STEPS. W-WE WERE CELEBRATING OUR VICTORY...
'...BINDING UP OUR WOUNDS...WHEN THE GROUND BEGAN TO SHAKE...EVERYONE FELL OVER...
"...THE TAU THING CRACKED AT THE BASE...AND THEN WE SAW THE WATER...A TIDAL WAVE SWEEPING TOWARDS ATLANTIS!
"THE WATER CAME DOWN LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD!"
I...I HAD CLIMBED ATOP THE TAU THING...THE WATER COULDN'T MOVE IT, IT WAS SO HEAVY.
I GRABBED SOMETHING FLOATING BY ME...PART OF A WOODEN ROOF. WH-WHAT HAPPENED?
DID WE...DID WE DO IT?
YOU DID IT. YOU KILLED THEM ALL.
I THOUGHT... MAYBE...YOU'D SAY...
ATLANTIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN UNDER THE OCEAN HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO. ONLY THE SPELLS OF THE PRIEST-KINGS KEPT THAT LAND ABOVE WATER.
I...TH-THANK YOU, THAT IS... ALL I...I...
STOP! SWORDSMAN, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE AMENDS?
YES.

WHAT IS THIS?
WE MAY NEED HIM. I MAY KNOW OF A SOURCE OF VERY POWERFUL MANA.
WHERE?
I'LL RESERVE THAT. DO THE WORDS 'GOD WITHIN A GOD' MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?
NO.
GOOD. GET A ROOM HERE, SWORDSMAN
SEE TO IT THAT THIS...OROLANDES IS WITH US WHEN WE MEET YOUR FRIENDS...
"...TOMORROW. AND THEN WE'LL SEE WHAT DEVELOPS."
IN THE VILLAGE OF THE FISHERFOLK HE HAD WAITED FOR THE IMAGES TO GO AWAY.
DON'T THINK OF IT, DON'T SPEAK OF IT. THE VIVID MEMORIES WOULD FADE.
OROLANDES SHIVERED IN THE MORNING COLD. HE HAD FALLEN IN AMONG MAGICIANS WILLINGLY AND BY DESIGN, AND HE WAS NOT SURE OF HIS SANITY.
DOWN THERE, IN THE SHADOWS...! THEY'RE COMING.
LET US HOPE WE HAVEN'T ALL MADE A WASTED JOURNEY.
BEFORE ATLANTIS, HE WOULD NEVER HAVE CONSIDERED A MAGICIAN TO BE ANYTHING BUT AN ENEMY.

I RECOGNIZE MIRANDEE. WOULD THAT BE PIRANTHER WITH HER?
I THINK SO. I ONLY MET HIM ONCE. WE DIDN'T PART AS FRIENDS... BUT THAT WAS FIFTY YEARS AGO.
CLUBFOOT, A PLEASURE TO SEE YOU AGAIN! AND YOUR... FRIENDS.
OH MY GODS! WARLOCK...? IS THAT YOU--?
:SIGH: THE MAGIC GOES AWAY. I SEE THAT YOUR OWN YOUTH SPELLS HAVE HELD BETTER.
WELL, I'M YOUNGER TO START WITH. HOW ARE YOU?
I LIVE. I WALK. MY MIND IS INTACT. I'M 240 YEARS OLD, MIRANDEE.
HE'S IN BETTER SHAPE THAN I AM. I'M WAYYHILL. I KNOW YOU BY REPUTATION.
AND I YOU. WARLOCK, IS IT PROPER THAT WE DEAL WITH THIS... MURDERER?
I KNOW TOO MUCH TO BE ABSENT, MY DEAR. WE'RE HERE TO RESTORE THE MAGIC. I WANT THAT MORE THAN YOU.
OBVIOUSLY.

SKULL, I SENSE THE AMBITION IN YOU. OTHERWISE YOU CONCEAL YOUR THOUGHTS. WHAT IS IT YOU HIDE?
DO YOU KNOW OF THE GOD WITHIN A GOD, PIRANTHER?
THOSE WORDS MEAN NOTHING TO ME.
THEN I HAVE KNOWLEDGE YOU NEED, AND I AM MORE HELPLESS THAN ANY INFANT. ON THAT BASIS, LET ME STAY.
I WON'T ASK YOU TO TRUST ME.
WARLOCK, I SHOULD BE GRATIFIED THAT YOU STILL LIVE.
AND YOU MUST BE CLUBFOOT. I KNOW YOU BY REPUTATION. BUT WHO ARE YOU, SIR?
OROLANDES. I...I WAS ASKED TO COME.
I ASKED HIM. HIS MOTIVES ARE GOOD. LET HIM STAY
ON TRUST?
YOU'RE A MAGICIAN, THEY SAY. READ HIS MIND.
N-NO...!
STAND STILL, SWORDSMAN THIS SHAN'T HURT...
...HURT... CORPSES FLOATING IN SHOALS AROUND HIS RAFT...
THEY COVERED THE SEA AS FAR AS THE HORIZON.
SHARKS AND KILLER WHALES LEAPT AMONG THEM...

UGHH! YOU MIGHT HAVE WARNED ME. YES, HE'S CERTAINLY HARMLESS.
BUT HE TRUSTS YOU NO MORE THAN I DO.
WHY SHOULD HE? NOW, MAY I PROCEED?
FIRST THERE WERE THE GODS. EARTH SPARKLED WITH MAGIC IN THOSE DAYS...
THE FIRST GOD ALMOST CERTAINLY CREATED HIMSELF. LATER GODS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN *THAT* POWERFUL.
THE GODS' LIVES WERE FUELED BY MAGIC, BUT WHEN THE LEVEL OF *MANA* DROPPED TOO LOW, THEY WENT MYTHICAL. BEFORE THEY DIED, SOME OF THE GODS PLAYED AT MAKING OTHER FORMS OF LIFE.
THEIR CREATIONS WERE THEIR SURVIVORS. SOME, LIKE MAN AND COMMON BEASTS, LIVE BY THE WARMTH OF FIRE--
--OTHERS NEED *MANA* AND FIRE BOTH. NOW MANY *MANA*-DEPENDENT PEOPLES ARE GOING MYTHICAL: MER-PEOPLE, DRAGONS, CENTAURS, ELVES...
HEY--!
THIS IS WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT! THE GOO ARE SURVIVING, BUT *LOOK AT THE MANA!*
SEE HOW SMALL IT'S GOTTEN? GOO NEED FIRE AND MANA TO SURVIVE, BUT THEY CAN LIVE BY FIRE ALONE...
...UNTIL THEY WILL PROBABLY BE TOO SMALL TO BE SEEN.
AND WE'LL SURVIVE, BECAUSE WE CAN LIVE BY FIRE ALONE. BUT NOTHING WILL BE THE SAME...
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THANK YOU. YOU'RE VERY ELOQUENT. SUGGESTIONS?
WHAT ABOUT YOUR PROJECT, PIRANTHER? FIFTY YEARS AGO, YOU WERE GOING TO MAP THE WORLD'S MANA-RICH REGIONS.
WE CARRIED THROUGH, IN SPITE OF THE RIDICULE. WE FOUND NOTHING THAT COULD BE OF USE.
TOO BAD. SO WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE US?
WE MUST FACE FACTS...
...IF WE CAN'T BRING THE MAGIC BACK TO THE WORLD, WE MIGHT AS WELL HAND IT OVER TO THE SWORDSMEN!
AND WHAT'S YOUR ALTERNATIVE, WARLOCK?
STONES AND IRON FALL FROM THE SKY EVERY NIGHT THEY BURN UP BEFORE THEY TOUCH EARTH
SOME STARSTONES DO REACH EARTH. THE BIGGER THEY ARE, THE MORE POWER THEY CARRY THE MOON IS HUGE...WHAT ELSE BUT MAGIC COULD HOLD IT UP?
THE MOON!

THIS ALL SEEMS VERY... HYPOTHETICAL. NOBODY KNOWS WHAT HOLDS THE MOON UP.
WE COULD PULL IT DOWN AND FIND WE'D USED UP ALL THE MANA DOING IT.
WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW HIGH IT IS...OR HOW BIG.
IT MUST BE TREMENDOUS. FROM ICELAND AND AUSTRALIA, IT LOOKS EXACTLY THE SAME.
WE'LL HAVE TO GIVE IT PLENTY OF ROOM, IF WE SOLVE THE OTHER PROBLEMS.
WE DON'T KNOW HOW BIG IT IS. HOW FAR IT IS... WHAT IT WEIGHS...OR WHAT HOLDS IT UP.
HOW THEN DO YOU PROPOSE WE ARE TO PROCEED?
THE POWER EXISTED FIFTY YEARS AGO, AT THE TIME OF OUR LAST CONFERENCE. ALL YOUR GROUP WANTED TO DO WAS MAKE MAPS!
MEASURE CAREFULLY YOUR WORDS, WARLOCK. I'LL NOT WARN YOU AGAIN.
ER...I KNOW OF A MANA SOURCE. THE LAST LIVING GOD IN THE WORLD.
A REMAINING GOD? I FIND THIS HARD TO BELIEVE WHEN EVEN THE DRAGONS ARE NEARLY GONE.
IT SEEMS MORE BELIEVABLE WHEN YOU KNOW THE DETAILS...BUT FIRST I WANT OATHS SWORN.
TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITIES, WHEN WE HAVE GAINED SUFFICIENT MANA FOR THE SPELLS TO WORK, WILL EACH OF YOU DO YOUR BEST TO RETURN ME TO MY HUMAN FORM?

REMEMBER, YOUR OATHS WILL BE BINDING. A GEAS IS MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY NATURAL LAW.
I HAD OTHER PROJECTS IN MIND. YOUR OATH WOULD CLAIM TOO MUCH OF MY TIME.
AND WHAT ABOUT AN OATH FROM YOU? THOSE WHO PULL DOWN THE POWER OF THE MOON WILL RULE THE WORLD.
WHY SHOULD WE GIVE YOU A HEADSTART ON THAT WHILE WE SCURRY ABOUT, FULFILLING YOUR OATH?
FAIR ENOUGH. I DO SWEAR THAT I SHAN'T USE MY ADVANTAGE TO WREST THE MOON'S POWER FOR CONQUEST OVER MY COMRADES!
BUT I WILL NOT SWEAR. THUS I PRESUME YOU WILL NOT GUIDE ME? THEN I AM ON MY OWN...
WELL, UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN.
THEN WE CAN SWEAR TO YOUR GEAS, WAVYHILL. YOU HAVE MY WORD.
AND MINE.
COMMON SENSE DICTATES I RENOUNCE THIS, BUT...YES. VERY WELL.
EXCELLENT.
THIS MEANS TROUBLE. IF PIRANTHER IS THERE WHEN WE PULL DOWN THE MOON, HE WILL BE THE ONLY ONE OF US WHO CAN CONCENTRATE PURELY ON CONTROLLING IT.
YOU AND YOUR STUPID OATH!
HE'LL HAVE SERIOUS TROUBLE FOLLOWING US.

THEY CLIMBED MOUNT VALHALLA ON FOOT: THREE MAGICIANS, TWO PORTERS HIRED IN PR.SSTHIL, AND THE SKULL OF WAVYHILL STILL MOORED TO THE WARLOCK'S SHOULDER.

ON THE FIRST NIGHT, THE MAGICIANS HURT EVERYWHERE. THEY COULDN'T EAT. THEY MOANED IN THEIR SLEEP.

AS THE ASCENT GREW STEEPER, THE PACKS GREW LIGHTER. FOOD WAS EATEN. HEAVY CLOAKS WERE TAKEN FROM THE PACKS AND WORN.

WITH ALTITUDE, THE MAGICIANS SEEMED TO GAIN STRENGTH. HERE ABOVE THE FROST LINE THERE WERE AREAS OF *MANA*. THEY WERE STRONGEST WHEN PASSING ONE OF THE OLD FALLEN STRUCTURES.

OROLANDES, CLIMB DOWN THERE AND GET ONE OF THOSE SWORDS.

I GAVE UP SWORDS.

MAYBE YOU WON'T USE IT...

"...BUT YOU SHOULD HAVE IT. MAGIC CAN'T DO EVERYTHING. AND NONE OF US HAS EVER USED A SWORD, EXCEPT WAVYHILL."

I HAVE IT...NOT THAT I WANT IT. I...*BY ZEUS!* A...A CLOUD...YOU ARE ALL STANDING ON A *CLOUD!*

A SIMPLE ENOUGH SPELL, ACTUALLY. IT TURNS VAPOROUS CLOUD SOLID SO THAT WE MAY RIDE UPON IT. CLEVER, NO?

I...I...PERHAPS I SHOULD JUST *WAIT* HERE UNTIL YOU...

NONSENSE. IT'S ALL PERFECTLY SAFE... JUST DON'T GO TOO NEAR THE EDGE.

THE CLOUDS STIRRED ABOUT THEM, THE FITFUL BREEZE RESPONDING TO CLUBFOOT'S CHANTS AND SPELLS. THE CLOUD CHURNED...
...MOVING AS A STORM ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE BELOW.
...THIS SPELL SHOULD BREAK THE LINK BETWEEN YOU AND PIRANTHER, OROLANDES.
NOW, WAVYHILL, TELL US ABOUT THE LAST GOD.
ROZE-KATTEE WAS MALE AND FEMALE, AND HIS ATTRIBUTES WERE LOVE AND MADNESS.
HE WAS GOD TO THE FROST GIANTS, WAY NORTH OF HERE, WHERE WE'RE GOING. HE HASN'T BEEN HEARD OF IN 500 YEARS, NOT SINCE THE NORDIKS CONQUERED THE FROST GIANTS.
YOU SEE, THE FROST GIANTS TOOK IT ON THEMSELVES TO PROTECT THEIR GOD, INSTEAD OF THE OTHER WAY AROUND.
WHEN THE NORDIKS BEAT THEIR ARMY, THREE FROST GIANT PRIESTS WERE TAKING ROZE-KATTEE TO SAFETY. THE GOD HAD LOST ALL HIS POWER. HE COULD BARELY MOVE.
HE WENT PEACEFULLY TO SLEEP, SOMEWHERE...
...BUT, IF WE'RE RIGHT, THEN ROZE-KATTEE COULD STILL BE ALIVE...!

LATER:
I WISH I COULD SEE YOUR HAIR, MIRANDEE.
WHY, SWORDSMAN! IS THAT A COMPLIMENT?
NO. I MEAN... THE WARLOCK SAID THAT IF YOUR HAIR TURNS PURE WHITE, THE MANA IS FAILING AND WE'LL FALL.
OH. MAGICIANS AND SWORDSMEN GO TOGETHER LIKE FOXES AND RABBITS. WHAT ARE YOU DOING AMONG US?
I DID A TERRIBLE THING. I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.
YOU MIGHT AS WELL TELL ME, OR I'LL READ YOUR MIND!
GO AHEAD. PIRANTHER DID... AND REGRETTED IT.
OOHH... I CAN SEE WHY. I SHOULDN'T HAVE LOOKED. THAT'S USUALLY THE WAY OF IT. I FIND OUT I SHOULDN'T HAVE LOOKED.
BUT YOU DID...
...AND NOW YOU KNOW EVERYTHING...
...ALL MY SECRETS...
AND THE SOFT WHITENESS EMBRACES THEM...

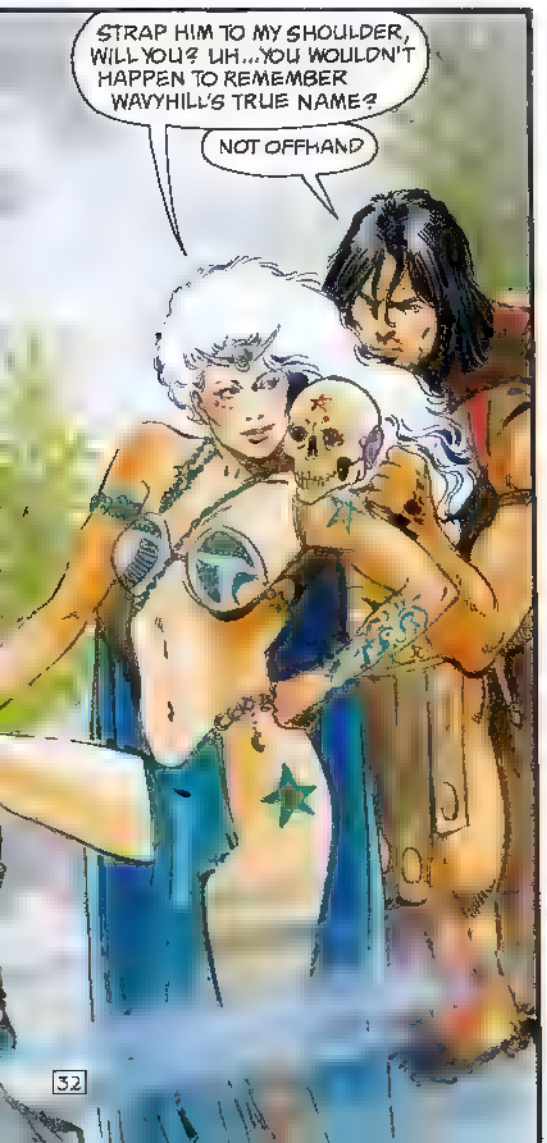
...WHILE TIME AND DISTANCES PASS...
...UNTIL...
EH--? MIRANDEE--DID YOU FEEL THAT...AS IF SOMETHING'S BUMPED THE CLOUD?
BY THE GODS! MIRANDEE...WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE IS THIS?
CAAW!
CAAW!
IT LOOKS HUNGRY! BACK, MIRANDEE...IT'S COMING!
IT...IT'S A ROC!
CAAAW!
FHTTURRSSH!
IT... IT'S DEAD!
HELP ME!... I STOLE ITS POWER. GODS, I FEEL SO CHARGED UP.
YOUR HAIR'S AS DARK AS THE NIGHT, MIRANDEE.
IT'S MAGIC, OROLANDES. LEAVE IT TO ME...I HAVE A VAMPIRE SPELL...!
OH? SHOW ME HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT DARK-HAIRED WENCHES, MY SWORDSMAN...!

ON THE MORNING OF THE THIRD DAY:
HAVE YOU SEEN IT, CLUBFOOT? AHEAD...THAT MOUNTAIN RANGE LOOMING BEFORE US--!
SEEN AND NOTED, GREEK. WE AIM FOR THE NORTHERN-MOST PEAK IN THE RANGE.
THERE'S MAGIC IN THAT MOUNTAIN.
THEN WE'LL BE GETTING OFF THIS ACCURSED...
HUH? I... CLUBFOOT! CLUBFOOT, I'M SINKING!
NOT NOW, OROLANDES. I NEED TO CONCENTRATE ON THE SPELL TO CHANGE OUR COURSE.
CLUBFOOT! WILL YOU LOOK AT ME, CURSE YOUR EYES!
WHAT? OH. QUICK, GREEK--GO FLAT ON YOUR STOMACH ON WHAT REMAINS--
--WHILE I TRY TO CONJURE YOU SOME FIRMER FOOTING FOR...
ER...
"...GREEK...?"
OROLANDES HEARS THE MUFFLED SOUNDS OF THE OLD INDIAN'S CHANTS...AND THEN NOTHING...
...AS ALL SOUND IS SUCKED UP BY THE FLEECY WHITENESS.
THUDD!
HE SINKS THROUGH THE WHITE BLINDNESS, HOLDING HIS BREATH AND READYING HIMSELF FOR THE MOMENT WHEN HE WOULD DROP OUT OF THE CLOUD
HE NEVER DID.

THE MOUNTAIN! WE WERE OVER THE MOUNTAIN! WAIT--
M-MIRANDEE? WARLOCK...?
THE STRANGER'S FIRST GLIMPSE OF OROLANDES SHOWED HIM TO BE MUCH TOO CLOSE, WITH SWORD DRAWN.
ONE OF THEM TRIED TO SCREAM AND THRUST HIS WEAPON AT THE SAME TIME.
HE DIED BEFORE HITTING THE GROUND. THE OTHER WAS NOT FAR BEHIND HIM.
THE LAST OF THEIR NUMBER WAS AN ALLY.
WARLOCK! ARE YOU...
Y-YOUTH SPELL'S WORN OFF. NO...NO MANA HERE. TAKE WAVY-HILL AND...
WHERE ARE THE OTHERS? MIRANDEE...?
DON'T KNOW. Y-YOU CAN'T FIND THEM... NOW GO... TAKE WAVYHILL...UPHILL...
...TILL WAVYHILL TALKS. G-GO!
OROLANDES WENT, THE SILENT SKULL TUCKED UNDER HIS ARM. HE WOULD FIND MIRANDEE OR DIE TRYING.
THE WARLOCK RESTED WITH HIS EYES CLOSED.
THE YEARS HAD CRIPPLED HIM FAR MORE THAN THE FALL FROM THE CLOUD, AND HE WAS TIRED, THE CLOUD SEEPING INTO HIS BONES.
METAL CLINKED.
HE OPENED HIS EYES.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO KILL ME, ARE YOU...?

I MAKE NO SUCH PROMISE. ARE YOU SUCH A WEAKLING AS YOU SEEM? HOW DID YOU SLAY MY MEN?
THE SWORDSMAN WE HIRED TO GUIDE US SLEW THEM, THEN FLED. HE WAS THE ONLY ONE OF US WHO KNEW HOW TO FIND THE TREASURE.
AND WHAT TREASURE IS THAT?
THE... UHHHNNNGH!... GOD WITHIN A GOD. SUCH A THING WOULD BE VALUABLE TO US. WE WERE ALL MAGICIANS... SAVE HIM.
I SEE. STAND UP... BUT DON'T TRY ANYTHING.
HEAR THAT, CLUBFOOT? THEY FEAR ME...EVEN IN MY WRETCHED CONDITION. HAH!
HYSTERICAL. HERE, LEAN ON ME, OLD MAN...
ANY ENEMIES WE HAD ARE GONE, TAKING WARLOCK AND CLUBFOOT WITH THEM.
MIRANDEE!
WE HAVE GOT TO GET TO SOME MANA. WHICH WAY TO THE NEAREST MOUNTAIN?
OROLANDES...?
HOLD! IF YOU'RE NOT A FRIEND, YOU'RE DEAD WHERE YOU STAND!

THAT WAY, I THINK...
THEN THAT'S THE WAY WE GO, OUT OF THIS DEAD AREA. UPHILL.
IF WAVYHILL CAN LEAD US TO THE "GOD WITHIN A GOD," WE'LL SUMMON THE OTHERS.
I HOPE HE'S UP TO IT. WAVYHILL DOESN'T LOOK GOOD.
WAS THAT A JOKE I HEARD...?
NO. I MEANT THAT HE COULD BE REALLY DEAD. I'LL HAVE TO DO THE REVIVAL SPELLS ALL OVER AGAIN.


STRAP HIM TO MY SHOULDER, WILL YOU? UH...YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO REMEMBER WAVYHILL'S TRUE NAME?
NOT OFFHAND

TRY TO REMEMBER. WE CAN'T DO THE REVIVAL WITHOUT IT.
NOR WITHOUT MAGIC. LET'S GO, MIRANDEE. TO THE EAST...
THEY CLIMBED.
THEY DIDN'T TALK MUCH. EACH HAD PRIVATE WOES WHICH THEY SUFFERED IN SILENCE...
...BUT MIRANDEE SENSED HER LOVER'S SHAME AT ABANDONING HIS COMPANIONS. THUS IT WENT--

--UNTIL THE EVENING OF THE SIXTH DAY...
..MAGICIANS SPEND DECADES SEARCHING OUT EACH OTHER'S TRUE NAMES, GREEK.
IT NUMBS MY MIND THAT YOU COULD HEAR MINE TWICE... AND FORGET.
NO, MIRANDEE, I'M NOT GOING TO TELL YOU. ENOUGH THAT THE WARLOCK AND CLUBFOOT CAN MOVE ME LIKE A PUPPET.
YOU WOULD BE ONE TOO MANY.
SUIT YOURSELF, WAVYHILL. BUT WITHOUT IT, I CAN'T HELP YOU IF THERE'S TROUBLE.
PARDON THE INTERRUPTION, MIRANDEE--
--BUT I THINK WE'RE CLOSE TO WHERE WE WANT TO BE.
MY HAIR...TURNING SO DARK! THERE'S MANA HERE, OROLANDES. LOTS OF IT!
WHAT'RE YOU STANDING THERE FOR, GREEK? THIS IS IT!
I WAS RIGHT. I WASN'T SURE... UNTIL NOW. BUT THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT!
GET GOING, GREEK. HURRY!
I'M GOING, WAVYHILL. BE PATIENT! I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU CLIMB ANY FASTER.
I DON'T FIND THAT THE LEAST BIT AMUSING!

MOMENTS LATER...
WELL? WHAT DO WE DO NOW, WAVYHILL...?
GO IN THERE AND FIND THE DORMANT GOD, OROLANDES. HE'S CLOSE!
WE DON'T HAVE THE POWER TO HANDLE THIS, WAVYHILL.
NOR DO WE HAVE A CHOICE. WE CAN'T WAIT FOR THE WARLOCK AND CLUBFOOT...
...AND WE CAN'T FIND THEM WITHOUT THE GOD'S MANA.
NOW, PUT DOWN YOUR SWORD AND GO FIND IT, GREEK!
UN-UNARMED? IS THAT WISE?
LEAVE IT HERE. OTHERWISE IT WILL KILL YOU. THE SWORD IS MAGIC. MAGIC WILL AWAKEN THE GOD.
THAT'S WHY MIRANDEE AND I CAN'T DO THIS DEED.
ALL RIGHT. BUT I DON'T LIKE THE FEEL OF THIS PLACE. IT FEELS...
...EVIL. MIRANDEE, I'D ...MIRANDEE? MIRANDEE!
I'M SORRY...THIS IS MY MISTAKE--MADE AT THE BEGINNING.
PIRANTHER! WHERE ARE YOU?
I'M JUST OVER YOUR HEADS, WAVYHILL. HA HA HA HA!
MIRANDEE! ANSWER ME, WOMAN!

SHE CAN'T, MUNDANE, FOR THE SAME REASON THAT YOU CAN'T MOVE. I'VE CAST A SPELL. NOW SHUT UP!
YOU-- KRANTHKORPOOL. SPEAK TO ME. DID YOU FIND THE DORMANT GOD?
MAYBE.
I COULD SMASH YOU. OR TAKE AWAY YOUR SENSES AND BURY YOU HERE. WHO WOULD EVER FIND YOU, KRANTHKORPOOL?
DON'T MAKE ME DIG FOR INFORMATION.
HMM. A POINT I THINK THE FROST GIANT PRIESTS MUST HAVE PLACED IT FAR BACK IN THE CAVERN. THE GREEK KNOWS.
THANK YOU. WHY DID YOU NEED HIM? YOU COULD HAVE FETCHED IT YOURSELVES.
IT'S BOUND TO BE TOO HEAVY FOR US...AND YOU AS WELL...
NOT WITH THESE BLACK OPALS. SEE HOW BEAUTIFUL THEY ARE?
THERE ARE MORE OF THEM IN THE SOUTH LAND MASS THAN IN THE REST OF THE WORLD. EVEN SO...
...OUR NUMBERS INCREASE. THESE WILL NOT LAST FOREVER. WE MUST HAVE THE DORMANT GOD...TO FEED SLOWLY OFF ITS CONSIDERABLE POWER.
BUT ONE LAST THING BEFORE WE BEGIN, KRANTHKORPOOL. YOUR FRIENDS, THE WARLOCK AND CLUBFOOT...!
WHAT OF THEM, PIRANTHER?

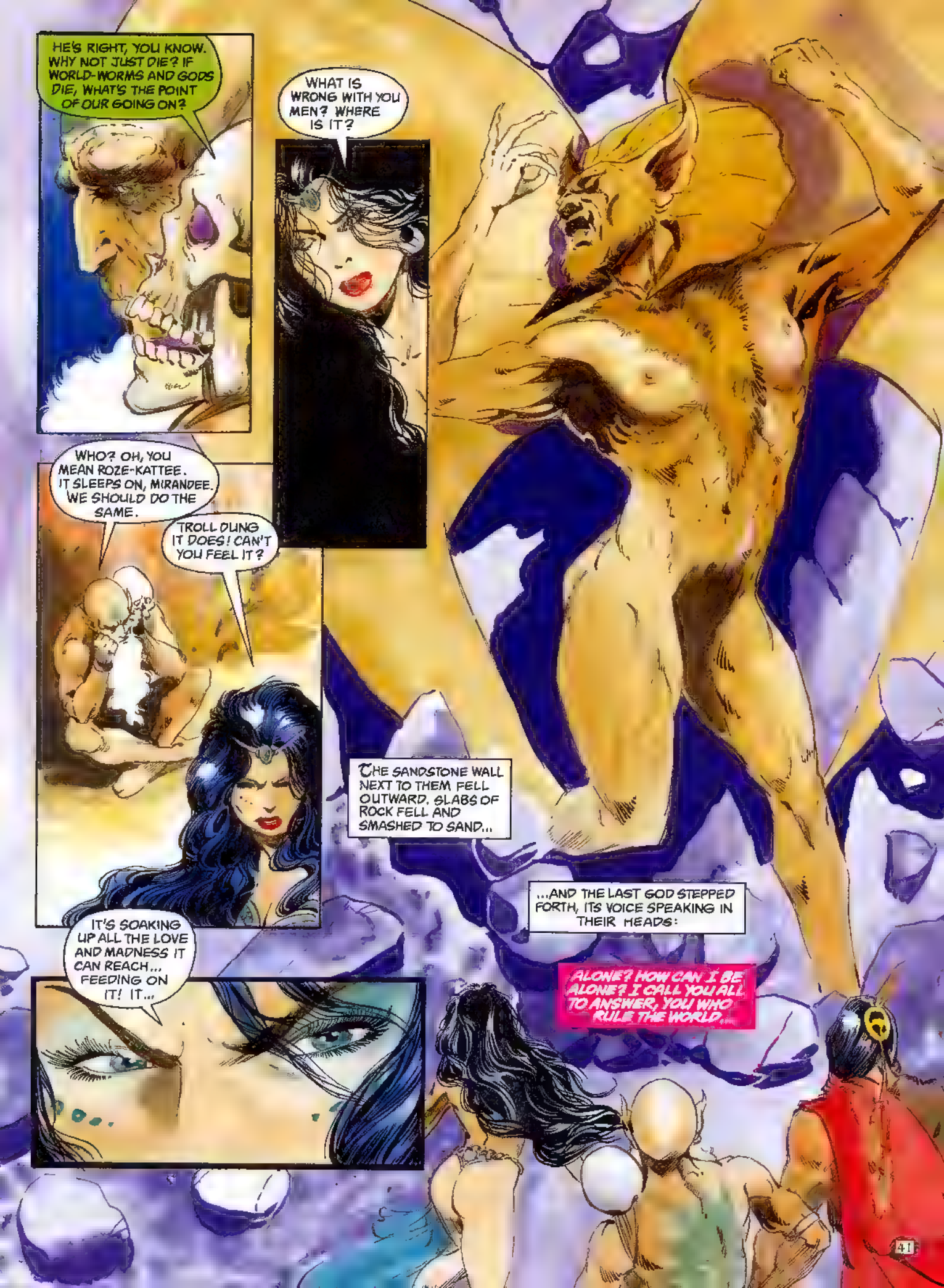
I'D FEEL BETTER IF THEY WERE WHERE I COULD KEEP AN EYE ON THEM.
EH--? WHAT NOW?
A SPELL OF TRANSPORT, WARLOCK. AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON. I THOUGHT FOR CERTAIN WE WERE DEAD MEN!
YOU MIGHT YET BE, CLUBFOOT.
PIRANTHER! YOU...I...C-CAN'T MOVE...
NOW WE CAN GET ON WITH IT.
I WARN YOU--YOU STILL WON'T BE ABLE TO MOVE HIM.
I'LL MANAGE. SEE YOU SHORTLY, DEAR KRANTHKORPOOL.
YOU CAN HEAR ME, CAN'T YOU? IF YOU'RE ALL DEAD, THEN I'M IN SERIOUS TROUBLE
BUT SOMEWHAT LESS THAN PIRANTHER, I'M SURE. HE'S DEEP IN THE CAVERN NOW--
"--SEARCHING FOR HIS LOST GOD...BUT I FEAR HE'S OVERLOOKED THE FOREST FOR THE TREES. AHH, YOU PROBABLY DON'T UNDERSTAND, GREEK.
"HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF THE WORLD-WORM? THE SNAKE THAT CIRCLES THE WORLD AND SWALLOWS ITS OWN TAIL?"

THE ALPS AND THE ANDES AND THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS ALL FORM A PART OF ITS BODY
AND YOU STAND WITHIN ITS MOUTH!
RRRUMBBLE!
UHN!
plink!
OH, HO! YOU'RE ALIVE, ARE YOU? THE PARALYSIS IS WEARING OFF...
...THOUGH I'M NOT SURPRISED PIRANTHER IS UNABLE TO MAINTAIN HIS SPELL, JUDGING FROM THE TREMORS.
A...WORM...? I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
GODS! THAT SCREAM...IT CURDLES THE BLOOD!
PIRANTHER. AS I WAS SAYING...LIKE ALL MAGICAL LIFE FORMS, IT TURNS TO STONE WHEN MANA RUNS LOW.
IF A MUNDANE WANDERED IN THERE, ALL UNKNOWING, NOTHING WOULD HAPPEN...
"...BUT A MAGICIAN--? THERE'S MANA IN MAGIC. PUT A MANA SOURCE IN THE WORLD-WORM'S MOUTH AND WHAT HAPPENS?"
HELLLLP... ME..
IT WAKES UP FOR A SNACK.
WELL, GOOD RIDDANCE. PIRANTHER GOT CLUBFOOT AND MYSELF OUT OF A HELL OF A MESS. REMIND US TO TELL YOU ABOUT IT ONE OF THESE DAYS...
AIIEEEEEEEE!

"...ONCE WE'VE RETRIEVED ROZE-KATTEE. OH, THAT'S THE NAME OF THIS SLEEPING GOD. IT WAS THE GOD OF THE FROST GIANTS --
"--PROTECTED THEM FROM THE INVADING NORDIKS, THEY TOLD US.
"UNTIL THE MAGIC WENT AWAY.
"AND ROZE-KATTEE WENT DORMANT. THE NORDIKS OVERRAN THE GIANTS THEN...
"...BUT THE FROST GIANTS CONTINUED WORSHIPPING IT...
"...THE GOD OF LOVE AND MADNESS!"
UHNNNNNN!
DAMN! IT'S PLANTED... SOLID...
...I COULDN'T MOVE IT AN INCH. IF NONE OF YOU CAN GO IN THERE WITH YOUR MAGIC, IT'S HOPELESS.
THERE MUST BE A WAY.
IF SO, I CAN'T THINK OF IT.
WAIT...WE CAN GET CLOSE, WAVYHILL, DO YOU REMEMBER THAT GESTURE SPELL, THE VARIANT ON THE WARLOCK'S WHEEL THAT CONTROLS MANA?
REMEMBER IT? I DESIGNED IT! I CAN TEACH ONE OF YOU THE GESTURES!
THEN... PERHAPS WE CAN DO IT...

DAWN, ON THE SUMMIT OF THE WORLD-WORM:
WE'RE READY TO BEGIN. GIVE ME YOUR SWORD, OROLANDES.
MY SWORD...? WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT, MIRANDEE?
IT... IT'S NECROMANCY, MY LOVE.
MAGICAL POWER... DERIVED FROM DEATH. MURDER. WE NEED ENOUGH POWER TO AWAKEN A HALF-DEAD GOD.
...BUT IT WILL SOON FIND OUT. STAND WELL BACK...
WE'RE GOING TO GET IT BY MURDERING THE WORLD-WORM.
GODS! MORE DEATH. ALL RIGHT, WOMAN...TAKE IT.
THE WORM IS REALLY DEAD ALREADY. IT JUST DOESN'T KNOW IT YET...
...AND MIRANDEE RAISED THE SWORD, HOLDING TIGHTLY TO THE HILT.
SHE BROUGHT IT DOWN HARD.
CHINKK!
THE MOUNTAIN SHUDDERED!
THE SONG SHE SANG NOW WAS UNPLEASANT, GRATING.
OROLANDES FELT NUMBNESS IN HIS FINGERS AND TOES AND A BLACK DEPRESSION CREEPING INTO HIS SOUL.
HE WATCHED AS THE DUSTY STONE WITHIN A RING OF SILVER CHAIN TURNED DUSTY PINK...
STILL SINGING, SHE POUNDED ON THE HILT WITH A ROCK UNTIL THE BLADE WAS ENTIRELY SHEATHED.

THERE! THROUGH THE RENT IN THE WORM'S CHEEK... CAN YOU SEE ROZE-KATTEE, WARLOCK?
AYE STOP TALKING... START CHANTING!
THE MOUNTAIN SHUDDERED AND ROCKED THEM WHERE THEY STOOD.
THE WARLOCK CURSED IN HIS MIND BUT HE STARTED CHANTING IMMEDIATELY...
Let my enemy's heart be mine, let my enemy's strength be mine...
HE COULD FEEL THE POWER IN HIM NOW. THE WORLD-WORM'S LIFE HAD FED HIM.
THE LAST GOD SEEMED TO MOVE IN THE FIRELIGHT.
BUT IT WAS AN ILLUSION.
ITS MARBLE ARMS GRIPPED THE WORLD-WORM'S TOOTH AS TIGHTLY AS EVER...
WAVYHILL...?
NO.
NOTHING. WE'VE FAILED...
"...FAILED..."
WE WERE JUST WASTING OUR TIME ANYWAY, OLD FRIEND. DEATH IS THE NATURAL STATE OF THINGS. ANIMALS DIE.
PEOPLE DIE.
CIVILIZATIONS DIE...SO, THE MAGIC GOES AWAY...


HE'S RIGHT, YOU KNOW. WHY NOT JUST DIE? IF WORLD-WORMS AND GODS DIE, WHAT'S THE POINT OF OUR GOING ON?
WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU MEN? WHERE IS IT?
WHO? OH, YOU MEAN ROZE-KATTEE. IT SLEEPS ON, MIRANDEE. WE SHOULD DO THE SAME.
TROLL DUNG IT DOES! CAN'T YOU FEEL IT?
THE SANDSTONE WALL NEXT TO THEM FELL OUTWARD. SLABS OF ROCK FELL AND SMASHED TO SAND...
...AND THE LAST GOD STEPPED FORTH, ITS VOICE SPEAKING IN THEIR HEADS:
ALONE? HOW CAN I BE ALONE? I CALL YOU ALL TO ANSWER, YOU WHO RULE THE WORLD...
IT'S SOAKING UP ALL THE LOVE AND MADNESS IT CAN REACH... FEEDING ON IT! IT...

HE...HE'S HUGE... TOO POWERFUL! THE LAST GOD MUST BE BEYOND COMPETITION...
...EVERY MADMAN AND LOVER MUST SERVE IT...
GET HOLD OF YOURSELF, WARLOCK!
CLUBFOOT, QUICK! WHAT'S YOUR TRUE NAME?
KA...
KAHAROLDIL...
MY NAME IS KAHAROLDIL, I AM YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER...
AN OLD LOYALTY SPELL, WAVYHILL? I'LL MAKE THE GESTURES, BUT...
THE WORLD-WORM WAS DECOMPOSING.
OROLANDES MOVED BY REFLEX, SWEEPING DOWN THE MOUNTAINSIDE...

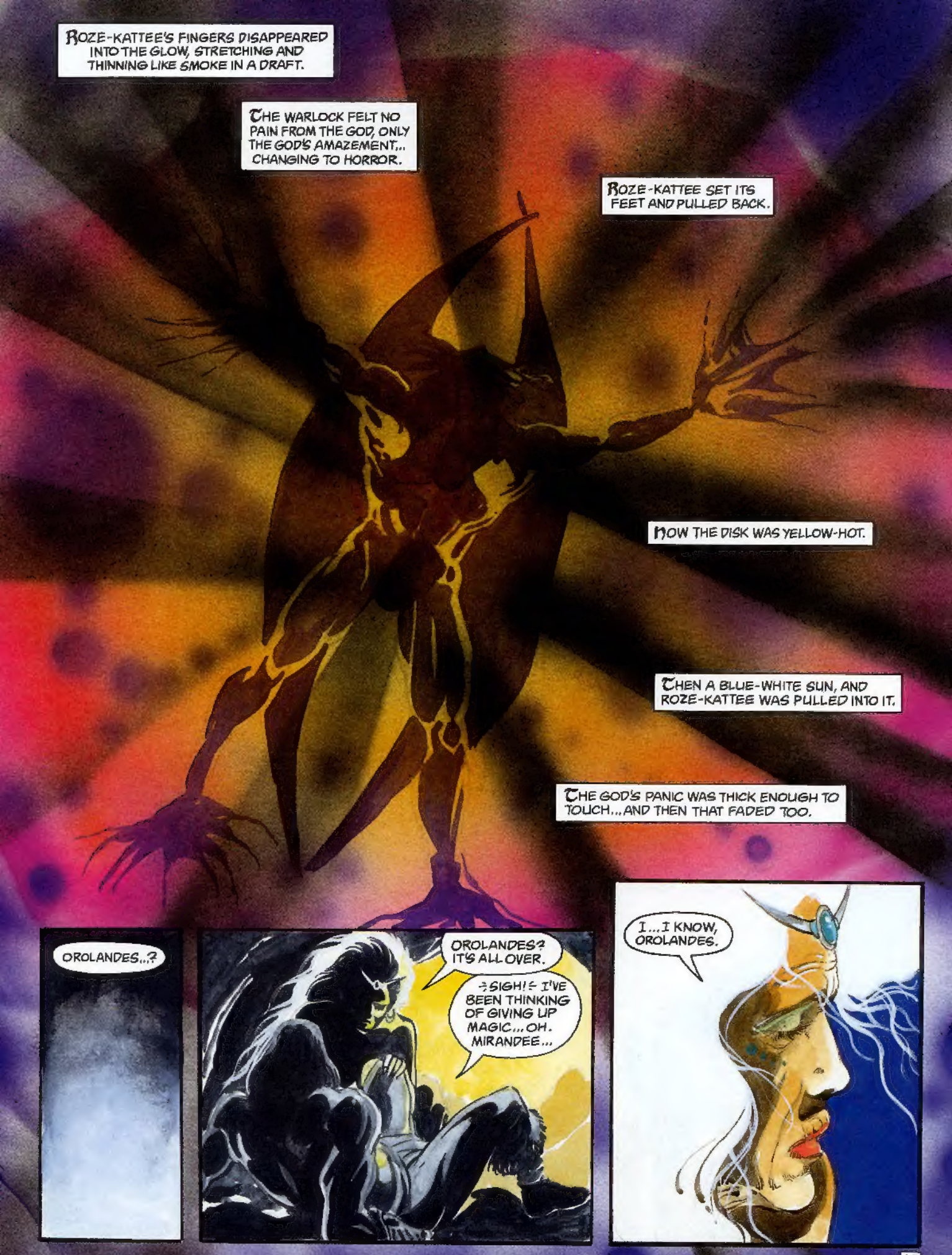
...BY ALL THAT IS HOLY...! IT... IT CANNOT BE...
...THE OTHERS. THEY WILL KNOW... WHAT IS HAPPENING...

I AM KAHAROLDIL, YOUR TEACHER AND YOUR WET-NURSE, YOUR ANCESTORS' GHOSTS...
EH? A LOVE SPELL?
SILLY AND PRESUMPTUOUS BUT YOU HAVE WAKED ME FROM MY DEATH SLEEP
HOW MAY I REWARD YOU?
YOU WOULD USE A LOVE SPELL ON ME?
WELL, YES, I SUPPOSE A LOYALTY SPELL IS A LOT LIKE A LOVE-SPELL,
WE WERE SILLY...
I... ER, THAT IS... I DO NOT KNOW...
YOU WISHED TO BRING DOWN THE MOON? I SEE IT IN YOUR THOUGHTS PERHAPS I WILL
VISIONS IN MY MIND... THE MOON... COLLIDING WITH THE EARTH...! IF THAT IS WHAT IS TO HAPPEN... NO!
CURSE YOU, YOU MANIAC! NO! WE DIDN'T KNOW!
BUT, IT IS WHAT I WANT. I CAN LIVE THROUGH THE TIME OF FIRE. I NEED THE... STATE OF THINGS THAT LETS GODS LIVE

M-MY MIND...PICTURES OF THE MOON...AND IS THAT EARTH...? I NEVER KNEW IT WAS ROUND...WHAT'S IT SAYING...?
IT DOESN'T MATTER! WHAT DO I DO NEXT...?
HOW CAN I STOP THE MOON IN ITS COURSE?
HOW? IT IS TOO HIGH AND TOO FAR
YOU WHO WORK IN A LAND THAT IS ALMOST DEAD, YOU MUST HAVE CONSIDERED THIS
AYE, AYE...HOW MIGHT I GO ABOUT STOPPING THE MOO...NO! I HAVE TO CONCENTRATE! THE LAST GOD SAPS ALL MY REASON.
PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BEST TO KILL THE THING...BUT THE MAGICIANS ARE IN NO POSITION TO DO ANYTHING.
WELL, I STILL HAVE THEIR METHODS...MIRANDEE'S CHAIN OF SILVER. IT'S MAGICAL!
-THAT WARPS DEAD REALITY TO LIVING REALITY!
OR...AM I BUT TOO SMALL? YES GOOD. I CAN DO THAT
AND, ASIDE FROM MY SWORD, .T'S ALL I HAVE...!
WITH THE DEAD MOON'S AID, I WILL PEOPLE THE CHANGED EARTH WITH MY CHILDREN
HAK! HAK! HAK!
BECAUSE YOU HAVE SERVED ME I WILL CREATE EACH OF YOU OVER AGAIN!
SCHONK

HURT HURT HURT HURT
I CAN REACH THE SKY AND... HURT!
WHAT...? WHO SAID THAT?
OROLANDES!
SOMEWHERE WE HAVE LOST CONTROL. ANY SUGGESTIONS?
KILL IT, NATURALLY.
I... DON'T KNOW. HOW WOULD WE DO IT ANYWAY?
"UNDERSTAND? WHERE I WAS TRYING TO LOOK THERE WAS NO MANA. SO MAYBE I'D BE USING A WARLOCK'S WHEEL."
"THAT'S SUICIDE FOR US BOTH. WARLOCK, THERE'S MANA IN GOD-MURDER..."
WITH THIS-- THE WARLOCK'S WHEEL.
I BUILT ANOTHER, TRYING FOR A PRESCIENT DREAM. I TOOK THE RIGHT DRUGS, SLEPT IN THE RIGHT FRAME OF MIND... AND NOTHING!
...IF WE CAN KILL IT AND TAKE ITS POWER--!
HOW?
MIRANDEE'S VAMPIRE SPELL.
SHE'D BE CREMATED, OR TURNED INTO SOMETHING SHAPELESS. COULD YOU HOLD THAT MUCH POWER? COULD I?
I HATE IT. ALL OUR WORK LOST. THE WORLD'S LAST LARGE SOURCE OF MANA...
...AND YOU TALK OF BURNING IT OUT TO SAVE A SWORDSMAN!
NO, WAYYHILL.
TO SAVE THE WORLD.

SUDDENLY, THERE WAS LIGHT.
OROLANDES WAITED.
THE HAND PAUSED AS IF BEWILDERED.
OROLANDES SPRANG. HE SLASHED AT A KNUCKLE... DUCKED UNDER THE WOUNDED FINGERS AND SLASHED AT ANOTHER.
NOBODY WHO LOVED OROLANDES WOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED HIM...
...SALIVA DRIPPING FROM HIS JAWS... HIS FACE CONTORTED IN MURDER-LUST.
THE MAGIC GOES AWAY AND NEVER COMES BACK.
THE MAGICIANS PANICKED. YOU MADE A WHOLE DISCIPLINE OUT OF MURDER AND RESURRECTION. PIRANTHER AND HIS BAND SCRAMBLED FOR SAFETY...
DO IT ALREADY, WARLOCK. BEFORE WE'RE STOPPED.
THE WARLOCK SPOKE A WORD IN THE OLD GUILD LANGUAGE...
...AND LET GO FAST.
THE WHEEL HOVERED IN THE AIR, SPINNING.
BOZE-KATTEE REACHED FOR THEM.


ROZE-KATTEE'S FINGERS DISAPPEARED INTO THE GLOW, STRETCHING AND THINNING LIKE SMOKE IN A DRAFT.
THE WARLOCK FELT NO PAIN FROM THE GOD, ONLY THE GOD'S AMAZEMENT... CHANGING TO HORROR.
ROZE-KATTEE SET ITS FEET AND PULLED BACK.
NOW THE DISK WAS YELLOW-HOT.
THEN A BLUE-WHITE SUN, AND ROZE-KATTEE WAS PULLED INTO IT.
THE GOD'S PANIC WAS THICK ENOUGH TO TOUCH... AND THEN THAT FADED TOO.
OROLANDES...?
OROLANDES? IT'S ALL OVER.
÷SIGH!÷ I'VE BEEN THINKING OF GIVING UP MAGIC... OH. MIRANDEE...
I... I KNOW, OROLANDES.

COME, LET'S SEE IF THE OTHERS ARE ALL RIGHT.
W-WARLOCK? WAVYHILL?
KAHAROLDIL, SPEAK TO ME. COME ON, SIT UP. WE NEED YOU.
I...COULDN'T HANDLE IT...
NICE, WASN'T IT? KNOWING HOW TO GRANT WISHES INSTEAD OF *WORKING* FOR THEM. MUST HAVE BEEN BAD WHEN THE GODS WERE ALIVE, THOUGH.
THEY MIGHT GRANT YOUR PRAYER, THEY MIGHT GRANT YOUR ENEMY'S...BUT THEY'D CERTAINLY GRANT THEIR OWN.
MIRANDEE, LOVE, WE SHOULD HAVE REMEMBERED WHAT THE GODS WERE LIKE.
WHIMSICAL. WILLFUL. WE GOT OUR PRAYERS GRANTED, BUT NOT OFTEN, AND NOT TOO *FAR* GRANTED.
IT'S OVER.
WE'LL SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE CAVE. GET OUT OF HERE IN THE MORNING.
WE'LL BE HUNGRY, AND YOU PROBABLY SUMMONED ALL THE GAME IN THE AREA, SO I'LL PUT A SPEAR TOGETHER. WHAT ABOUT THE SKULLS?
MIGHT AS WELL LEAVE THEM. I WISH...
WHAT?
NOTHING...
END

Earth's great age of sorcery is ending—and when the magic dies, so will the last magician!

In the days when sorcery reigns supreme, Warlock is the most powerful being on Earth...until the magical Mana starts wasting away and the only hope for the survival of sorcery lies within the fabled "God within a God"...if that dread deity can be found before...

THE MAGIC GOES AWAY

Photo: Willy Leon

LARRY NIVEN

"Larry Niven is one of those unusual science fiction writers who works as hard getting his facts right as his story right. The combination is magic."
— James Gunn

"Larry Niven writes the best and most consistent fantasies since Lewis Carroll. Obviously, I'm not unprejudiced, but damn it, he's just incredibly good. And 'The Magic Goes Away' is his best fantasy yet."
— Jerry Pournelle

"Before Larry Niven put his hand to it I was never able to really enjoy Sword and Sorcery. And I never knew why. Then he turned the formula inside-out and it all came clear. Those sword-wielding barbarians are the bad guys. Marauding thugs smashing their way through anything they didn't understand. In Larry's stories I could comfortably root for the wizards—which I always wanted to do."
— John Byrne

DC COMICS INC. NEW YORK N.Y.